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Social Implications of Picture Writing in Modern Society

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

I wish to present my philosophy on the social implications of picture-writing, i.e., painting or the graphic arts in modern society using forms in comparison from past history. I shall demonstrate, through analysis, social art of today with the graphic description of the earlier artists.

During my research I came across this statements by Herbert Read, who says:

> Pictures should be painted for painters. For people in general artists should design useful things and be content if the public is unaware that they do anything else.[1]

I must respectfully disagree with Mr. Read's statement. His statement seems most selfish in meaning and implication. I feel that painting should be for the masses to look upon and appreciate, to be enlightened and moved by their implications. Artists have a tremendous obligation to society, to help, as it were, through their painting, to improve our communities as a whole. How can we do this if we paint only for the enjoyment and enlightenment of painters?

The story value of painting cannot be dismissed. Painting comes into contact with society and finds its proper function through associative channels, but in so doing runs the risk

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[1]Herbert Read, The Philosophy of Modern Art (New York, Noonday Press, 1955), p. 61.

of becoming, in the end, utterly false and conventional.

A painter must have some basic convictions, some points of departure. His business is not to teach but to reveal and to communicate meanings which may be confirmed, shared, and enjoyed by an intelligent mass audience. He must preserve his independence. I do not mean that he must be free in the Bohemian sense, that he must live in a state of irresponsibility which prevents him from facing any useful experience. He must be free to approve, or question, any system, creed, or situation.

Above all people, he must be an individualist, but not in the sense described, or there is no art. Every genuine artist is in the act of revolt not only against the prejudices and practices of traditionalism in his own field, but in the field of society as a whole. This, I think, will always be a part of his life as an individual, under all systems and at all times, unless he is again forced to return to the slave status, where, as simple craftsman, he will do the bidding of his political master. It is better in the interests of a more abundant life such as is gained through extensions of experience that the artist be allowed complete freedom. To bind him to dogma, to make him the illustrator of thesis, as the Communists decree, or the trivial tool of the dictator, as did the Nazis decree, is to sell him down the river or emasculate his powers. For once he is under the thumb of any system, no matter how idealistic, he becomes the slave of accepted symbols which, the moment they are found to be

effective instruments of propaganda, are rigidly guarded.

There are two basic schools of thought concerning painting in the twentieth century. One school feels that painting is a means to an end, while the other school feels that painting is the end result. If painting were the end result as these people imply, then it would have no social significance.

In this thesis I wish to stress that painting or picture-writing is a means to an end. The end result being, through the powerful influence of graphic picture-writing, we can remold and educate mankind, and strive toward a more unified and happier society in which to live.

Arnold Hauser's statement in his book, "The Social History of Art," seems to sum up painting's place in society quite well.

> Art must not be an idle pastime, a mere tickling of the nerves, a privilege of the rich and the leisured, but that it must teach and improve, spur on to action and set an example. It must be pure, true, inspired and inspiring, contribute to the happiness of the general public and become the possession of the whole nation.[2]

A society consists of a complicated group of people, doing many things, both good and bad. Man has always strived toward the good way of life, and religion, of course, plays the greater role here. But, in many cases, man strives to help man in ways other than the religious aspect. One of these ways, and I feel, one of the best and most comprehensive, is through the transmission of messages to society through picture

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[2]Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, Vol. II, (London, Butler and Tanner, Ltd., 1952), p. 95.

writing, painting, the graphic arts, prints, etc.; through this means of picture-writing, man's desires to display the good qualities of man as well as showing the evil sides will be presented.

In order to understand mankind fully, man must be able to communicate. Man has always realized the necessity for improving communicable forms for better understanding of his fellow man's problems. Man always seeks newer or better ways of communication with man regardless of race, creed or color. In our day and age we have the telephone, radio, television, movie camera, telegraph, newspaper, magazines, etc., and all of these means and ways of communication have helped to unite and clarify the peoples of the world. But still, the most expressive, dynamic way of communication is through the medium of picture-writing or painting. Painting is still the most efficient way of expressing emotional experiences, which cannot be communicated or satisfied in any other medium. Picture-writing has expressed all of the fear, hate, love, arrogance, obscenity, ignorance, prudery, anger and wisdom of mankind. It is the one true means by which the artist is able to unite himself, through his creative work, with a receptive audience.

Even though we now have our great television and radio networks, our daily newspapers and weekly magazines to give us our news, pleasures, etc., and they try to stir up agitation against something or someone, or try to develop viewpoints of different natures about many subjects, still, I feel we are only getting half-truths. These mediums of communication stir

up feelings about certain subjects; yet, in many cases, we are only getting a limited view, that is the view of this particular medium, whether it be radio, television, etc.

Now, people will say, isn't that what artists also do in their paintings? Are we not again getting only a limited view?

In most cases, the artist, through his insight and skill, is able to dig and delve into the core of the problem and present the problem on canvas in such a way that all peoples can understand regardless of language, race or creed.

Among the artists there are men who are more deeply concerned with one or the other side of life than the average citizen who has settled down to a routine. In consequence of their psychological make-up, they feel more strongly the vibrations of the ground on which they stand, or have a more intense desire to communicate to others what they think or feel.

For instance, the depression had a more profound, or, at least, a more demonstrative effect on American art than any other external event of the decade. In a country which had always considered art a luxury, the painter was one of the first to suffer. He was also one of the first to question the justice of a social order that seemed to have dealt the worst hardship to those who were the least responsible for the situation. Rico Lebrun, a modern contemporary painter, had this to say concerning artists and how they make their living:

> One would think by the manners in which the community asks for our credentials on moral matters, on religion, on politics, that the community must at least sustain us, be responsible for our minimal security. But we,

PLATE I

LEBRUN, The Crucifixion

> the artists who are asked all these questions, have but one characteristic in common. We can't make a living! So you see we are expected to be sober, cheerful, communicable, well-dressed, well-behaved and responsible to the community which does so much for us. I would like to ask the professional men, how would you like to do dish-washing, carpentry, baby-setting and floor walking, in order to be able to carry on your profession? It is possible, just possible, that you would become unmanageable neurotics[3]

The result of the hardship suffered by the artist, caused the rapid growth of a school of social protest or socially conscious painters who attacked wealth and privilege, and allied itself with the worker, the jobless, the racial minorities. These artists felt with passionate conviction that art must justify itself by its service to humanity, that the artist must become a responsible member of society, indeed that he had a special obligation to society's conscience. They made use of expressionistic distortion often pushed to violent extremes. In the hands of the social protest painters, distortion served a purpose; it was a weapon of attack, a tool to dramatize a specific situation. At times, social protest art was rather declamatory, but in the work of its best men, such as Ben Shahn, Philip Evergood, and Jack Levine, it reached a moving sincerity and a perfect adjustment of means to end.

> The Genius of an individual artist may so use the materials placed in his hands by his milieu as to solve deep-rooted emotional problems of his society in a novel and completely satisfying manner or give an enduring interpretation of human life and social reality that acts as a solace to man in all times and places. The values of that he seeks to embody in his art work transcend not only himself but his immediate environment; his faith that these are

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[3]Selden Rodman, The Eye of Man (New York, The Devin-Adair Company, 1955), p. 22-3.

> eternal values of mankind gives him the rare prerogative to control and recreate his time and circumstances.[4]

People are, and more than likely will always be visual minded. People have always been able to look upon something with their eyes and be able to comprehend more exactly what is taking place, than if they had only heard or read about a certain happening. The old adage, "one picture is worth a thousand words," is quite true in this sense. The artist, through his medium of picture-writing, is able to penetrate deeply into the core of the matter. Whether he is striving to undo an injustice or if he is glorifying truths, he is able through painting to capture the motivation forces pushing him forward, and mold them into a comprehensible work of art for all mankind to look upon.

The role of the painter in society, then, is one not only of a creator but an interpreter as well, for the artist is able to add immeasureably to the subject in maligning the interpretation.

> Art thus is one of the most efficacious means of social control and guidance, enforced as these are by an appeal to sensation, emotion and imagination in sensuous forms, patterns and symbols. Therein lies the true significance of art in society as expounding the justifying or challenging its aims and pressures of those of an established order or regime.[5]

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[4] Radhakamal Murkerjee, The Social Function of Art (New York, Philosophical Library, 1954), p. xi-xii.

[5] Ibid., p. x.

INTRODUCTION

There are two basic classes existing today, as in years past, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Each distinct class has its own champions to glorify or debunk its systems to society. They expand upon the charms and values and qualities of their own particular group and at the same time show the seamy, ugly side of the other.

Especially singled out is that branch of art which takes for its topic disagreeable, socially conditioned facts, such as the suffering of the poor, abuse of power, or racial discrimination. Two lines can be clearly distinguished. The one attacks the forces which cause these conditions; the other attempts an objective depiction of the life of certain groups. The latter is censured for dragging unpleasant and ugly things into art; the other because it makes art a battleground for opinions, which is, according to the objectors, a degradation of art's high purpose.

Sometimes, as is the case, these champions try to change the outlooks, deeds, manners, systems, customs, etc., of their own class through ridicule, sermons, moral indignations, in order to purify it, strengthen it, or change it into a more unified whole.

Many of the modern depictions are extremely impolite. The artist's status in our society has changed. He no longer

belongs to the upper level of society, as he once did, nor is he, in general, its spoiled child who in return glamorizes its wishes and exploits. He is as cutting as a surgeon's knife in his attempts to bring to light the intrinsic quality of things and men.

Do we object to the want of beauty in the face of violent and unjust death, in the face of inhuman cruelty committed in the name of humanity? There are people who are ready to agree that such happenings are part of the social system; but still, they say, to portray these events is not art. Who has ordained so? Who are those who make the rules? Aesthetic laws, like the laws of nature, only state what has been observed, they do not prescribe what art or nature should do. As an example, Rouault's prostitutes are "ugly" enough to place last in any beauty contest, but they are thunderously true to life and to the Christian spirit the artist is illuminating by thus presenting them--and therefore beautiful as art. So then, the depiction of the ugly is admissible if it serves to achieve moral beauty. Can any purpose have more moral justification than the fight against injustice and cruel hypocrisy? And is that not what we find again in Siqueiros' "Proletarian Victim," Daumier's "After the Verdict," Blume's "Eternal City," Gropper's "Senate?"

It is said that Art is the true mirror of its time. But it is more than that. It is the vanguard of cultural progress, if by cultural progress is meant man's attempt to catch up with the conditions he has created, to face the reality

and to live at peace with them. By destroying idyllic dreams, by profaning sacred lies, modern picture-writing rallies those who scent the spring air and flee the sickbed of decay, those millions of scattered persons who feel that something is wrong in our time, but cannot lay their finger on the "why." The individual who has progressed to independent thinking and therefore cannot accept obsolete views, still outwardly adhered to by the majority in his environment, feels guilty, uncertain and lonesome in the face of the solid front of those who are afraid to open the shutters to the truth. Though unable to give men a purpose or to lead him on, art calls upon him to desert the armies of inertia.

The purpose of art in this time, then, has a social function to fulfill. The expressed purpose of this art varies in different areas. Every period has its art, and it is true art if it fulfills the tasks ascribed to it, that is, if it clarifies and communicates the spiritual contents of its time and helps to unroll or solve its problems, ideas and strivings.

CHAPTER I

EARLY ASPECTS, HOW ARTISTS OF THE PAST HAVE INFLUENCED THE MODERN ARTISTS IN SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

We all learn from history, from the past. Man's moral and ethical values have not changed greatly over the years. In our present age we are still trying to solve the basic moral and ethical issues that have plagued us from generation to generation. Some of the social issues that we are striving to change today are not greatly different from those of Goya's time.

Goya projected a series of paintings and etchings that show his great indignation at the sufferings of the Spaniards in the French invasion under Napoleon. We the observer can become aware of the same turbulence of our modern times. Goya's paintings, such as the "Execution of the Citizens of Madrid" or the frightening "Disasters of War" aquatints, reflect the painter's violent response to the immediate political situation and the oppression of his people. These paintings are concerned with the hours immediately after a Spanish uprising against the invading troops of Napoleon. Civilians are being rounded up indiscriminately and shot down by the French soldiers. Goya shows this as a menacing night scene filled with powerful dark and light contrasts. From the group

of the dead and the condemned a startlingly bold figure stands out, arms thrust wildly into the air, challenging the anonymous and menacing grenadiers to shoot.

He painted the massacre and bequeathed to mankind, not the most tragic nor the most touching commentary, but the most frightening curse ever uttered against the horrors of war. This is a picture which should be reproduced in full color and hung in the council chambers of the war lords of every nation.

His genius attains its highest point in these paintings and etchings on the horrors of war. When placed beside the work of Goya, other pictures of war pale into sentimental studies of cruelty. I do not believe that Goya should be called the first deliberate opponent of militarism; it is by no means certain that he disapproved of war as an institution, for he got into enough trouble with his personal life to substantiate this fact; he had no sympathies with causes or movements, but instead, an insatiable curiosity in life and the energy to indulge it, and through his own hardships, a far-reaching knowledge of the feelings of the poor and of the cannon-fodder. He saw horrible things and his senses revolted, but in expressing his experiences, his purpose was not to show the iniquity of war but how men and women behave in circumstances of tragedy and suffering. He avoids the scattered action of the battlefield, and confines himself to isolated scenes of butchery. Nowhere else does he display such mastery of form and movement. The body of a man dangles from a tree, lynched. A soldier, shot to death, raises his arms as he

PLATE II

GOYA, Shooting a Group of Citizens By Scldiers of Murat

falls; we not only see the arms in one position, but we feel the pull of the whole movement. A woman, clasping a naked baby against her hip, drives a lance into the groin of a uniformed brute; her lunging figure is composed of a few lines, but every line is a living nerve.

Two other social critics of this period were Hogarth, an Englishman, and Daumier, a Frenchman. Both have influenced todays social protest picture- writing and picture-writers. Hogarth moralized on virtue and vice in his eighteenth century England. Such is the picture in which a misguided young man falls prey to the murderers hired by his mistress, as in "Betrayed by His Mistress." The women, in this picture, not only display signs of syphilis, but also expose their breasts, thus attracting and repelling at the same time. We find a similar subject in his "Rakes Progress," and "A Harlot's Progress." The moral touch is not quite so obvious as in some of his other works, such as the mentioned "Betrayed by His Mistress."

The harlot is a victim of circumstances, having come to London and been seduced by her employer, so that her ultimate fate in Bridewell Prison is not so much a punishment for sin as an exhibit of man's cruelty. Similarly, the artist considers the Rake a foolish, unfortunate young man rather than a sinner, delineating the unusual and exciting things that happen to him and taking the opportunity to lampoon the disgusting habit of fashionable folk who visit Bedlam Insane Asylum for amusement.

PLATE III

HOGARTH, The Visit to Bedlam

Hogarth was very much concerned with the viciousness of English public institutions at that time. He was more than an entertaining portrayer of manners and customs; he became a social critic on a high level. The fact that his enormous subject matter contains criticism against any violator of the decencies makes it difficult to maintain that he is for one class against another; yet, Hogarth was a product of the new "middle-class" honesty of sentiment, the right to speak up against iniquity in any form.

The French counterpart of Hogarth was Honore Daumier. Daumier was one of the first painters to lay bare the shortcomings of a social system. Himself poor, he portrayed those who belonged to the ruling class by name only and drudged along, hard-working and miserable. The laundress, the butcher, the crowd on the train are typical examples of what he did. Direct, scornful repudiation speaks out when Daumier points to the high-handedness of justice. How proud is the lawyer as he leaves the court-room with the crying widow who has lost her case.

Daumier's first published work attracted the attention of the editor of a radical sheet called "La Caricature," and he was invited to join the staff of that unsavory organ. He accepted, was allowed much freedom, and being very young, turned his heavy artillery into the ranks of the Orleanist politicians. In a short time, he won unenviable notoriety, the respectable artists regarding him as a vicious gamin, the catspaw of rabble-rousers; and the political cowards shaking

PLATE IV

DAUMIER, Rue Transnonain

in their boots at the sight of his masterpieces of slaughter. He was no fanatic, no wild-eyed anarchist seeking the dubious honors of martyrdom. He did what he thought was right, dealt a powerful blow, and took the consequences.

The murders of the Rue Transnonain (April 15th, 1834), inspired Daumier with one of his most terrible masterpieces. He represents a workman's room, at sunrise; to the right, in the foreground, near an overturned chair, lies the head of an old woman. Against a disarranged bed, a man, clad only in a blood-stained shirt, is stretched out, the eyes closed, the mouth half-open. His left fist is clenched; and the muscular legs are set wide apart. In the shadows, in the background, lies the body of a woman, the head of whom disappears in obscurity. The struggle is over; the soldiers have left; but this solitary hour is even more tragic than the moment of the massacre. It is a powerful declamation against civil war.

In his attacks against the "gens de justice" he was aggressive, biting, cruel. He shows barristers, with lordly gait, and insolent mien, advocates shrivelled with envy, seated defendants, hardened and cynical, and deaf, somnolent old magistrates, on whom rests the charge of judging other people very much like themselves. He painted the subject matter he understood, the men and women with whom he had toiled and suffered, the thieves and hypocrites preying on society, and he painted with a depth of feeling surpassing any other Frenchman.

Comparable with the rich productivity of Daumier is

the slightly later Thomas Rowlandson, an artist who has been called by some, the greatest of British caricaturists. Covering every aspect of English life, this French-trained draftsman becomes a link between the French eighteenth-century print makers of "galant" subjects and the fashionable themes and the nineteenth-century analogues of Daumier and his Contemporaries. Like Daumier, Rowlandson used certain stock types who reappear again and again in his pictures of society, duchesses, soldiers, butchers, promenaders, gamblers, artists --even types from other countries that he visited. Apart from this elaborate cast of characters for his comedy of manners, Rowlandson also constructed a series of bestial types, gross and monstrous beings who revel in cruelty of all sorts and suggest in a general way the more exaggerated figures of Goya.[6]

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[6]Bernard Myers, Modern Art in the Making, (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950), p. 89.

CHAPTER II

CLASS CHAMPIONS IN EUROPE

Of the class champions in Europe, Rouault, Kallwitz and Picasso stand out. The contemporary painter, Georges Rouault was one of the modern-day crusaders against those who would enforce unjust restrictions upon society. Judges and the law courts have long been targets for Rouault. His painting, "The Three Judges," shows venality, arrogance and stupidity. His judges wear expressions of greed and complacency of corrupt officials. He is capable of moral indignation over and beyond his religious convictions and here assaults the corruption of the law courts at their worst, hewing out the brutal planes of his three jurists' faces as if his brush were an avenging axe. The "Three Judges" is one of the great works of Rouault's middle period when hatred of evil seems to have been a stronger incentive in his art than piety or pity.[7]

The world Rouault's paintings depict is a grim one, suffused with an intense passion that ranges from savage anger to religious ecstasy. Their subject matter consists for the most part, human beings caught in an atmosphere of eternal tragedy, sad-eyed clowns, bloated prostitutes, corrupt-look-

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[7]Alfred H. Barr, Masters of Modern Art (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1954), p. 161.

PLATE V

ROUAULT, The Three Judges

PLATE VI

ROUAULT, Prostitutes

ing judges, and the suffering figures of Christ. He is a deep-religious painter, and nearly every one of his works is a parable or commentary on the drama of human life seen through the eyes of a Christian mystic. However, his mysticism is concerned only with the pessimistic side of Christianity, with the crucified rather than the victorious Christ.

In a period of intense loneliness and inner torment, depressed by evils he saw around him, Rouault poured out his emotions furiously in a style recalling the biting, satirical art of Daumier and Hogarth. In ruthless portraits, "Mr. X," "The Couple," and the "Three Clowns," plus the previously mentioned "Three Judges," Rouault lashed out at members of society who stood for hypocrisy and materialism, while in starkly sympathetic scenes he portrayed the degraded figures of slum and circus life who were to him the victims of an unjust humanity. "Mr. X," is an imaginary portrait of a man who has existed eternally, an overlord whose face glowers with avarice and venality. "The Couple," seated in a cabaret, were painted as overstuffed symbols of worldliness and false pride. His "Red Haired Woman" and "Prostitutes" were painted as martyrs of society's injustice and his protest against the degradation of the human spirit.

Along with Rouault, Kathe Kollwitz, a German, felt the sufferings of the poor, oppressed peoples of the world. So she portrayed the peasants plight to the world. Her pictures hold meanings not only for the peasants in Germany at that period of time, but for all peoples who are being persecuted by

the aristocracy, politicians, or military. She portrays fights and battles in the fields, peasants wielding their only weapon, pitch-forks, against the modern weapons of today; she depicts the hunger of the oppressed so realisticly that one feels the pangs of hunger when viewing her work; she portrays mother and child with warmth, dignity, death of mother and child with wretched despair.

Many critics felt that Kollwitz's work contained a dreary monotony about the suffering type of woman and limited subject matter, her main subject matter being mother, child, peasant, the worker, etc.

Kathe Kollwitz grew up in an atmosphere of social and moral idealism. She was a dramatic artist who dealt in human emotions and who evoked them with a great subtlety through gesture and facial expression. She has been compared by some to Goya.

The Silesian weavers, who earned a precarious living with hand looms, and the industrial revolution which swept Europe, the conflict between the factory and the home, the powerloom and handwork, inspired her to create a dramatic sequence called the "Weavers." The episodes follow a dramatic pattern of provocation, angry reaction and tragic end, "Poverty," "Death," "Procession of Angry Weavers," "Storming the Owners House," "Death By Soldier's Rifles," "In the Weavers Home," for almost the first time the plight of the workers and his age-long struggle to better his position received sympathetic treatment in pictures.

Kollwitz did a few frank posters--appeals for starving

PLATE VII.

KOLLWITZ, Death Reaches For a Child

children, for playgrounds and better housing, against war, against loan sharks and drunkenness, etc. For the working class, she projected a way of life, envisaged a noble world.

The next class champion is Pablo Picasso, one of the founders of the cubist movement in painting, and called by some, the greatest living painter today. Picasso also had social commentary to expound. Picasso, a Spainard by birth, painted one of the most powerful protests against war. Before the start of the Second World War, Hitler sent his Stutka dive-bombers over the Spanish town of Guernica to "practice" the art of dive-bombing, strafing and killing.

Picasso, exasperated by the tragedy that was drenching his motherland with blood, began his mural-painting, "Guernica." This large composition in black and white is certainly one of his masterpieces, if not his greatest masterpiece. For while he expressed in it the horrors of war in apocalyptic images, for his purpose he called only upon form and contrasts of shadow and light. Instead of describing, as did Goya or Delacroix, for example, a certain military episode or scene of slaughter, Picasso succeeded, for the first time in the history of Western painting, in terrifying the spectator merely by a plastic transcription of an actual event and convicting him of guilt by combining, with shrewdness and passion, specifically pictorial values. The tragic and the burlesque, sarcasm and pity, imprecation and irony, the palpitation of life and the immobility of death, a tumult of thoughts and emotions spring from this agonizing picture with an intensity

PLATE VIII

PICASSO, Guernica

that is at the limit of human endurance.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL PROTEST FROM MEXICO

While Grosz was exposing the demoralized passions of post-war Germany, and Benton was struggling with a social history of the United States, the Mexican artists, Posada, Orozco, Rivera and Siqueiros, grasping the opportunity afforded by the revolutionary turn of events in their country, developed the first socially significant mural painting of modern times.

In order to lighten the burden of the suppressed peons of Mexico, these artists attempted to arouse public rath and fury against the suppressors, the aristocracy and ruling classes. Because of the high rate of illiteracy in Mexico, murals, screaming of injustice, indignation and salvation, were erected throughout the country in order that the people might see them and be moved by their implications.

Regardless of whatever superficial prosperity Mexico may have shown in the era of Diaz, however many new mansions, broad avenues, railroads, telegraph lines, and flourishing business enterprises may have appeared, the fact remains that the bulk of the Mexican people were in a state of mediaeval misery. On the haciendas, brutal managers kept this enormous portion of the population in virtual serfdom. Forced to buy their necessities at the hacienda store at arbitrary prices, the peasants remained in constant debt-peonage, lived on a

PLATE IX

POSADA, Calavera Huertista

PLATE X

OROZCO, Carnival of Idealogies

PLATE XI

OROZCO, Katharsis

bare subsistence diet, suffered from disease, and were harried by the rapid increase of prices. Here was one potential and immediate source of the type of art Mexico produced.[8]

In order to reach the people so that they might see and react to an unjust society, Posada used a technique of producing pamphlets to distribute to the poor and illiterate. These prints became a sort of poor man's Bible, as it were. The impact had to be forceful, either horrible or ludicrous, or both. His skeleton pictures were used extensively during this period. The "Calavera Federal" is a portrayal of one of the scourges of the early Revolutionary period. The "Calavera Huertista," shows the vicious Huerta as a loathsome tarantula with a skeleton head, devouring the skeletons of his victims. His work inspired Orozco who was never to lose Posadas' sense of a mad world careening to catastrophe.

One of Orozco's earlier paintings, "Despoiling," shows the greedy prostitutes robbing a derelict. Throughout his career he returns to the prostitute theme, not in any cynical metropolitan sense but rather as a Dostoyevskian symbol of the corruption and weakness, the sadness and isolation of the individual. Thus the wretched figures lurking in doorways, black shadows of despair, as in "Waiting Woman," or the obscene creature on her back in the "Bellas Artes" mural of 1934, are all taken from everyday life and converted into symbols of reality in terms of Orozco's one theme, humanity.[9]

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[8]Bernard S. Myers, Mexican Painting in Our Time (New York, Oxford Press, 1956), p. 6.

[9]Ibid., p. 43.

As a result of some of his work being defaced by vandals and "students," Orozco retaliated by executing a number of violent murals. Among these, the "Justice and the Law" shows a bloody and drunken female figure, bandage down on one eye, waving her scales with one arm, the other about the shoulders of an ugly-looking politician. In the "Final Judgment," a cross-eyed Father-God is flanked by a group of overdressed bourgeoisie, the saved, while on the outer side is a group of miserable poor, the damned. Above these creatures a leering old hag, liberty, is supported on golden cords. Farther on, the artist shows a rich man stabbed in the back and then a heap of symbolic objects. The "Social and Political Junk Heap" includes at this early date a Nazi swastika. One of the most effective scenes depicts two bony hands emerging from ragged sleeves and dropping coins into a locked church box, under which a fat ring-covered hand is placed to catch the coins as they fall through. The final caricature, "Reactionary Forces," shows fat and thin male and female snobbish figures, with noses upturned, walking along ignoring the tiny miserable creatures over whom they tread.

One of Orozco's more grotesque arrangements is "The Carnival of the Ideologies," symbols of the political ideologies that mislead the people with their juggled slogans. One, for example, shows a puppet holding a hammer and sickle and controlled by a sinister soviet caricature. Another portrays a figure with a combination swastika-sickle attached to its head and holding a pair of detached arms which he causes to shake

hands. Confronting the soviet puppet-master is a trio of fascist symbols, a Japanese waving a pair of dummy clenched fists, an animal-like caricature of Mussolini with arm extended in salute, and a figure of Hitler wearing an arm band with swastika and star and a liberty cap. The general intent and impression are completely anti-totalitarian, with the various ideologies leering and mocking at one another.

The Mexican artist thought by some to be the greatest mural painter of our time, was Rivera. In many of Rivera's pictorial representations, he tends to represent the Mexican Revolution not as a local phenomenon but as part of the world revolution. The bourgeoisie and millionaires whom he attacks, however, are primarily United States figures rather than the millionaire socialists of Mexico who were busily plundering the land. I feel that his contributions toward social-protest painting were more of a propaganda nature than a striving to undo injustice in his native land. His contribution was pictures of a revolution realized or the ideals of the revolution. Orozco, then, portrayed its betrayals and deceits. This leaves the final artist of this period, Siqueiros.

Siqueiros rushes forward with a constant exhortation to fight. Siqueiros in "Echo of a Scream," blasts out against the brutalities of war. His "The Devil Church" attacks the official Church of Mexico, the Catholic Church. In this picture, the rich sit in the balcony, uncluttered and comfortable, while the peon is packed on the floor worshipping the forces that are about to destroy him. Needless to say, Siqueiros

does not glorify the church or God in his works. At the present time, Siqueiros is in jail in Mexico. He was put in prison because of his "leftist" actions against the Mexican Government.

PLATE XII

SIQUEIROS, Proletarian Mother

CHAPTER IV

SATIRE ON TOTALITORIANISM AND SUPPRESSION IN GERMANY, AND GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST SCHOOL

A school of painting was started in Germany and it was given the name German Expressionism. This school got its peculiar flavor from the discovery of the primitive. Edvard Munch, James Ensor and Max Beckmann were part of this school of painting, and they contributed a great deal to it. George Grosz and Otto Dix, though not a member of this school, per se, nevertheless, learned from them and contributed much to this movement. These were men who were very much concerned with the social order of their day. This school began to receive recognition about the time of World War I. Shortly after the great war, Germany began a period of depression, suppression and totalitarianism.

Edvard Munch, a Norwegian painter, spent much of his time in Germany. Munch's art is not primarily primitivistic but it is full of anxiety and high-keyed emotion. The finest of Munch's works are equalled only by the best of Daumier. In his "The Cry," the swirling skies and expanding ripples of sound that fan out from the open mouth to fill the whole universe, are cries of anguish and despair. Does this not reflect the times?

Another major artist of this German Expressionism was

PLATE XIII

MUNCH, The Scream

the fanatic artist, Belgian James Ensor. Ensor was concerned with such social paradoxes as the discrepancy between Christian doctrine and war. Ensor's conclusion was that "the dream of reason begets monsters."[10]

Ensor's world is peopled with monsters, monsters of sadism and monsters of indifference. Christ, when He appears in it, is only the archetype of man persecuted. He is Ensor, the unappreciated genius. Ensor even wrote his own name in place of "INRI" over the Crucifixion, and the name of one of his insensitive critics on the Centurion's lance. His "St. Anthony" is a bewildered old man. In his "Baptism," two figures are dunking each other with wash-buckets. Ensor found comic fantasy the only means of dealing with disasters seemingly too vast and illogical for tragic treatment. But Ensor's laughter, unlike Goya's, was without rage, and unlike Daumier's, it was without fellow-feeling.

The next social critic of the German Expressionist school was Max Beckmann. The shock of the War, which convinced him, a participant, that nothing said on a small scale or in a private language would measure up to the enormities of his time as he had witnessed them. Beckmann painted the "Crucifixion," "The Woman Taken in Adultery," "Bathsheeba," and "The Battle of the Amazons." He even attempted to convey the immediate impact of such recent events as the "Messian Earthquake" and "The Sinking of the Titanic." War's suppression of the individual had made Beckmann look for a code language

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[10]Selden Rodman, Eye of Man (New York, Devin-Adair, 1955), p. 105.

PLATE XIV

BECKMANN, Night

PLATE XV

BECKMANN, Dancers

that would say big things without causing a strain for more magnitude. In an adaptation of North German Gothic, the harsh wounded features, the elongated rubbery limbs, he found it.

Everything in Beckmann is larger than life, the personalities, the emotions, the symbols, everything but the communicative content. That is always suppressed. His sympathy hides behind the archaic grimace, his will to freedom behind the ambiguous gesture. In the easy-going Germany of the Weimer Republic he had dealt obliquely with the bestialities to come. Under Hitler he spoke perforce in parables, hiding his "Departure" in an attic and entitling it "Scenes from Shakespeare's Tempest."

George Grosz and Otto Dix declared war against the conventions, tastes and standards of respectable society, even against reason itself, because of their outrage at the stupidity and folly of World War I and its aftermath. Grosz is unsurpassed in the savage humor of his attacks on militarism and bourgeois complacency.

If Dean Swift took the prattle of the nursery fairy tale and made "Gulliver's Travels" the most terrifying satire in literature, so Grosz has taken the vulgar pictures little boys draw on back-house walls and converted them into a grown-up art so cynical and ferocious that it starts the brain spinning toward the whirlpool of insanity.

His target was the bourgeois, the smug middle classes that accepted humbly the benefits of the military caste of the Kaiser and licked its boots. At the outbreak of the war, in-

stead of soft-pedaling as caution dictated to social satirists the world over, Grosz became more vicious.

To him, soldiers were burghers goose-stepping. Grosz portrayed a soldier in uniform, standing at attention with a chamber-pot for a head. Junkers drank boisterously in cafes with prostitutes, while in full view through the windows, blind and crippled soldiers groped and hobbled by.

Grosz used more effectively than any artist the X-ray invention of the Futurists. Every woman walking along the street, no matter how modestly downcast her eyes, was just a whore to him, and he proved it by making transparent her silks and the furs to reveal what her quick-darting mind was actually concentrated upon. His men were worse, because they were swinish and sottish. If trouser flaps were sometimes opaque to his X-ray, bulging cloth, pulled taut, was even more revealing.

Sensuality was intensified to beastliness, and Grosz had no scruples about the perversions. All this sexual grossness came eventually to a ferocious saturnalia in a series called "Ecco Homo."[11]

"Ecco Homo" may be termed the "Anatomy of Degradation." It is neither erotic nor obscene; it is profoundly and surgically explicit. It presents a culture gone mad, a society, once composed and clearly abandoned to its most ignoble instincts. The exposal is essentially metropolitan, largely

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[11]C. J. Bulliet, The Significant Moderns (New York, J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1936), p. 168.

PLATE XVI

GROSZ, Metropolis

PLATE XVII

GROSZ, Sidewalk Flirtation

PLATE XVIII

GROSZ, Third Class Funeral


Parkplatz

the life of Berlin; the sorrows and fortitude and lingering decencies of the provincials and pious country folk do not figure in the picture. It is a dreadful picture, a world of fleshly corruption in which the spiritual side of man has been battered to extinction, in which men and women leer and roll and snicker, but there is no gaiety in their lives and no rollicking laughter, not even levity, nor satisfaction, only the fulsome grunts prodded out of them by the coarsest physical stimulation.

There are scenes from the cafe and the brothel, the bedrooms and the officer's boudoir, the park, the garden, the ballroom and the sewer, scenes from public and private life, and so far as Grosz is concerned, it was all conspicuously public. There are dumpy old matrons grinning prominently in the throes of an unexpected sexual reawakening, men with annular faces and turnip heads lunging in bestial embraces, old lechers avidly handling the acquiescent bulk of their hired women, women with snouts and broken tusks, women with enormous breasts webbed and bitten, monstrous women, part snake and part sow, naked and unregenerate, conscious of nothing except the periodic relief of their tumescent organs, guzzlers and drunks, young and old, street-walkers, gluttons, vampires, homosexuals, and always in the background, with searing irony, the legless soldier, the beggar, the starving and innumerable poor. One might think in viewing this picture that the German ideal, if it may be so denominated, was universal and unproductive copulation.

Grosz states:

> I was so full of hate that I was, maybe, a little insane; but this work purged my system of much poison--if it has any other value, it is as a reflection of the utter demoralization of post-war Germany.[12]

Sex is used in his paintings as a means to substantiate the protest against a self-righteous, degenerate society which condemns openly what it supports clandestinely.

Another commrade-at-arms with Grosz is Otto Dix. Dix stuck closer to realism than did the brutal caricaturist Grosz, but his pictures are none the less savage. They are what another Goya might have done in a war where there were larger and better cannon than Napoleon sent into Spain. If half a living face has been shot away, Dix doesn't bandage the empty eye socket nor the torn mouth with its horribly widened grin. No undertaker has visited the dead on his battlefields to compose their contorted features into something more presentable to weeping relatives. Glory, to judge from their pictures, has gone out of war. Nor was Dix much kinder to humanity in general, apart from war, than Grosz. His society folks at the theater or in the cafes are a pretty contemptible, lecherous, moronic species. He doesn't use Grosz's X-ray machine, but the observer does not need it.

In his painting "The Night," in quiet but terrifying fashion he has set down accurately the sentiments of that horrible end-of-the-war period, the nightmarish quality of a

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[12]Thomas Craven, Modern Art (New York, Garden City, Halcyon House, 1950), p. 213-4.

time when Germany was starving and when sadistic impulses were more overt than imagined. In the"Trench," it is not the gruesome setting, the destroyed earth and tattered bodies, that account for the effect of quiet horror and fantastic rigidity, it is the inexorable definition of mutilated things.

PLATE XIX

DIX, Animal Trainer

PLATE XX

DIX, Trench

CHAPTER V

COMMENTATORS ON CITY LIFE:

THE ASH CAN SCHOOL

Robert Henri, who is given credit for founding the Ash Can school of painting, gathered around him a group of dedicated painters. They were John Sloan, William Glackens, George Luks and Everett Shinn. These young men found a kind of spiritual mentor in Robert Henri. Henri convinced them that the painter was under a moral obligation to give artistic expression to contemporary life; and he provided them with new models, calling their attention to painters who had already found an artistic form in which to express a forthright, unclouded view of contemporary life, Goya, Daumier, Hogarth, who were bound to arouse the professional interest of these journalistic artists. Henri said:

> To have an art in America will not be to sit like a pack rat on a pile of collected art of the past. It will be rather to build our own projection on the art of the past, wherever it may be, and for this constructiveness, the artist, the man of means, and the man on the street should go hand in hand.[13]

Henri returned to New York after some moving about. Glackens and Luks were already there; Shinn and Sloan arrived; Bellows and Hopper got their first ideas on art here. Also

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[13]Peyton Boswell, Jr., Modern American Painting (New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1940), p. 49.

joining this school (the New York Art Students League) was Jerome Myers, who had found his subject matter in the deeply human scenes he had witnessed in the slums of Manhattan; Eugene Higgins, who with a heavy monumental line learned from Daumier, began to portray the desperate misery of the urban poor in pictures. This interest in the poor and commonplace, in New York slums where from the standpoint of academic idealism only ugliness was to be discovered, soon brought these painters the nickname of "Ash Can School." But actually they did not accuse; their pictures of misery were without moral intent. Politically, to be sure, they were far to the left; Henri was a humanitarian Anarchist, Sloan a staunch Socialist. But as painters they were far too much interested in the discovery of the New York scene with its motley human mixtures, too much in love with their subject-matter to make use of it for purposes of political agitation.

The "Ash Can School" of painting, then, grew out of the hurly-burly of the American city along its main stem, in its back streets, and in its honkytonks, bars, cheap restaurants and rented bedrooms. John Sloan comes close to being a one-man summary of the "Ash Can School."

Sloan had as his chief motivation force, his interest and love of human beings. He liked what was common, everyday and universal, preferring the life of the great mass of people to that of the upper classes. He liked the places and occasions when people got together for sociability and enjoyment, restaurants, barrooms, dancehalls, parks, and that new phenomenon, the five-cent movie. He enjoyed character, in people and

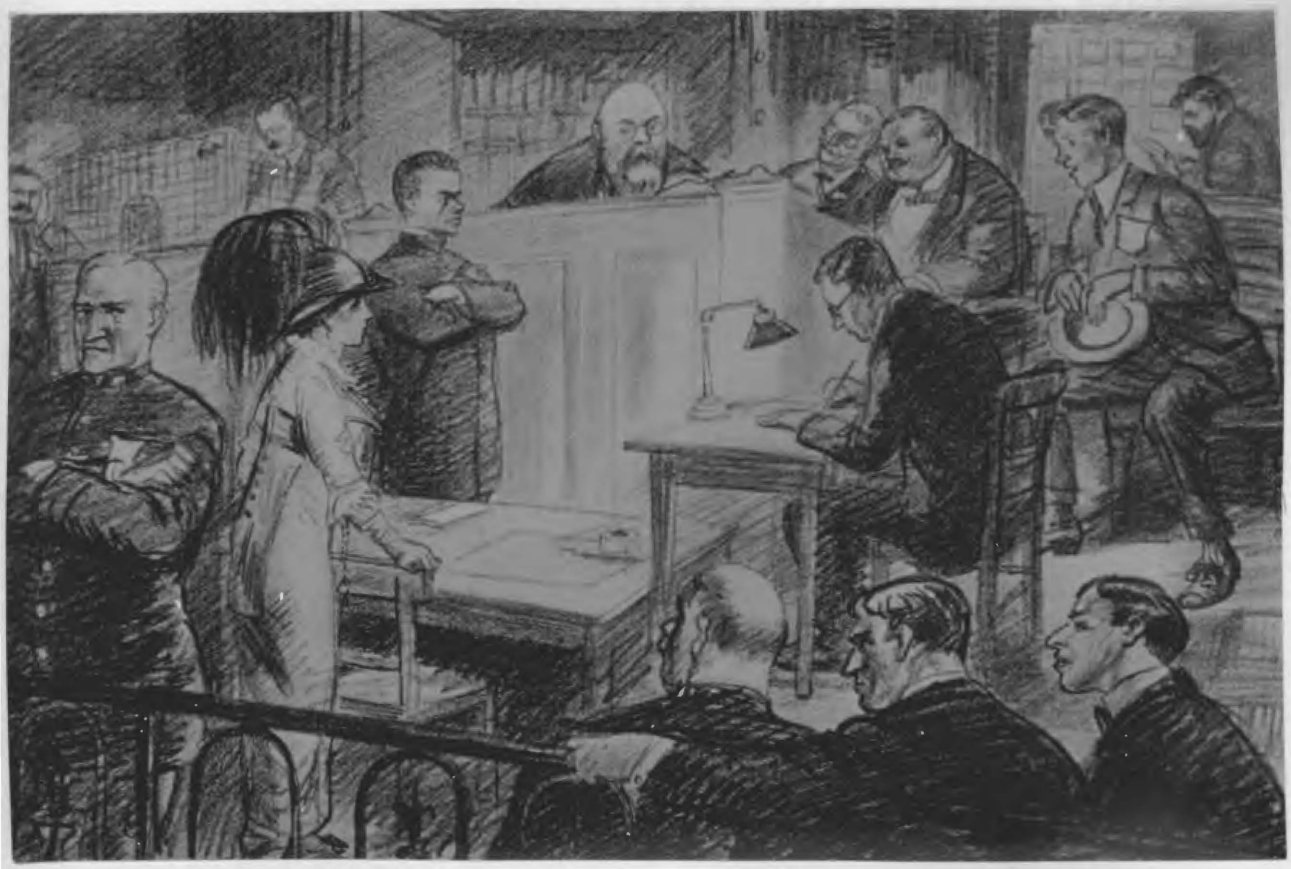
PLATE XXI

SLOAN, The Hairdressers Window


CURLINE

PLATE XXII

SLOAN, Before Her Maker and Her Judge



in places, and the humor of daily life. His art had that quality of being a direct product of the common life, absolutely authentic and unsweetened, that has marked the finest genre art of all times. It has plenty of sharp satire, usually directed at the rich and pretentious. But on the whole, his was a kindly humor, without the bitterness of later city realists. His view-point was fundamentally affirmative, beneath poverty, drabness and the commonplace, he saw essentially humanity!

Almost all of Sloan's work contains social implications, but as stated, not all is satirical. The "Return from Toil," for instance, shows a group of working girls arm-in-arm, laughing and fooling, not only completely lacking social protest but is Sloan's affirmative statement that workers are not necessarily the pathetic stock figures of socialist cartoons.

On the other hand, he was himself no weak satirist. At first his satire was more social than political, such as his attack on the luxury and callousness of the privileged class. It was always the human side of social questions that inspired his best work, such as "Before Her Maker and Her Judge," based on what he had seen in the Jefferson Market Court. The problem of women, their working conditions, concerned him particularly. Religion was another theme that aroused him. When a crowd of unemployed homeless men were refused shelter by a New York Church and their leaders arrested, "His Calling the Christian Bluff," was a biting comment.

Along with Sloan, Bellows, Glackens and Luks, portrayed with warmth, dignity and humor, the plight of the common man.

PLATE XXIII

BELLOWS, Stag at Sharkeys

PLATE XXIV

BELLOWS, Benediction in Georgia

Bellows liked the athletic clubs and arenas. He made the prize fight subject his own, as in his "The Stag At Sharkey's." Bellows, though not a member of the original "Ash Can School," nevertheless followed closely their line of thought.

Shinn, an admirer of Degas, blended realism with gaiety as he depicted theatrical life. His most famous painting is "London Music Hall," owned by the Metropolitan Museum. Luks protrayed the figure and the street types found in New York. His slum children, playing in the streets, dancing and playing, are painted in the lusty, boisterous way of a Frans Hals. He painted America with a life and zest that has never been equaled. His love of his fellow man shines through in the glowing faces of the two children dancing cheek-to-cheek in "The Spielers."

Glackens was primarily interested in the cafe scenes of the city as well as their inhabitants. He also portrayed the political scene, but not with the acid bite of Jack Levine or Ben Shahn. His was a more kindly look at the political world of that period.

CHAPTER VI

COMMENTATORS OF THE DEPRESSION YEARS

The Thirties, in America, were years of despair and hunger; resentment and revolt were natural themes for many American artists. Paintings were charged with pity or political faith; the same emotion turned the artist to satire when the subject was unsympathetic. The non-political among them painted what they saw, the unemployment on city streets, the dying cattle on dust-blown ranges. The politically conscious artist saw and painted these too, but painted them with bitter, satirical militance; the hungry, the depressed, and the helpless were victims of a heartless system; capitalists, politicians, and the police were hideous monsters.

Among the strongest of these social commentators were William Gropper, Reginald Marsh, Louis Guglielmi, Philip Evergood, Ben Shahn, Jack Levine and Thomas Hart Benton. To be sure, there were other fine social-protest painters of this time, and we will take a closer look at them later in the chapter. We will be concerned in the first part of the chapter with the more successful or more commonly known painters of this period, mainly those mentioned above.

The strong drawings of William Gropper were among the harshest of this period. In his "Senators," the subjects are either uniformly vicious or senile. While one man pledges the

cause of justice, the figures in the lawer left hand of the picture glare at the proceedings, while the rest of the figures seem bored with the entire proceedings. Two men stand talking aimlessly, while another is almost asleep at his desk.

Grooper continually pilloried the smug, the complacent, the over-privileged and the underbrained of society. Equipped with a vigorous, graphic and a scathing line, Grooper, like Daumier, seethes with a burning indignation of injustice of every kind--human, social and political. Like the great French artist, he does not spare the Legislature. His "For the Record" is a blistering indictment of blathering in high places. We have seen men of his sort before, and know his oratory will end on the same note it began--complete and redundant vacuity.

On the other hand, Reginald Marsh is one of those painters, who, rather than stir up ire, expounds upon the good qualities of the common man. He painted just people and everyday happenings. Marsh painted New York, the New York that he loved, in all its grand vulgarity. With no disposition to take sides in economic or social squabbles, or to whip himself into a fighting rage, he is an observer of life, of that very real slice of it extending from the shop and subway to the dance hall and Coney Island. The smart circles of society do not interest him; well-bred people bore him and he cannot paint them with any degree of success. He instead paints Harlem bowery bums, pan-handlers, burlesque shows and burlesque girls, sailors, parks, bread-lines, shopgirls and the girls on

PLATE XXV

MARSH, They Pay to Be Seen

PLATE XXVI

MARSH, The Steeplechase

the public beaches, frolicking, laughing, loving and living.

Marsh has this to say:

> I like to paint burlesque because it puts together in one picture a nude or near nude woman, baroque architecture for a setting, and a crowd of men, very typical men, for an audience. I like the great Coney Island beach for its infinite number and kinds of people, for the physical manifestations of people from head to toe, its variety of design and its great vitality. Just in this way there is enormous and endless material to paint in New York, exciting, rarely touched, and waiting for the artist to make use of it.[14]

He shows the Coney Island side show in his "Pip and Flip." He gave it this title after the Peruvian pin-heads who were in the show. While giving bold play to the gaudy billboards in the background, he emphasizes a livelier side show provided by the mob of onlookers below. In his "They Pay to Be Seen" and "Monday Night At the Met," he takes great relish in depicting the socialites who are busy leering at each other. In these paintings his satirical comment is cutting.

After he saw a bevy of befurred beauties parading past the window of the large Department stores in New York, Marsh did a number of paintings of the exteriors of stores, contrasting the lifelike but static window tableaus with the lively pageant of the street, as in "Mind and Mannequin." "The Steeplechase" was done at Coney Island. He paints with compassion and humor this sailor and his girl astride a lunging horse on a merry-go-round, which was outdistancing two of its race-track competitors.

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[14] Ibid., p. 142.

Louis Guglielmi was another commentator of the depression years. In his powerful painting "The Hungry," he reflects the despair and fear of relief seekers. He paints the gaunt, staring faces of the man and woman as they push the cart along which holds their meager possessions, the cruel, scornful face of the woman in charge of relief as she scowls at the poor helpless individuals who seek work and the complete dejection of the figure who sits holding his slumping head in despair.

One of the most effective social-realists in America today, and one of the frankest in his convictions, is Philip Evergood. He paints all aspects of modern life, the scenes of struggles and strife. Evergood is more important than some social-protest painters or members of the social conscience group to the degree that he has found more adequate volumes, tensions between volumes, and sufficiently expressive colors to convey his feelings in a given situation. His "Don't Cry Mother" is typical of the controlled violence of his color, the passionate protest of his social message.

Evergood's statement "American Tragedy" shows the full horror of a police assault on masses of helpless citizens--everywhere. It is a masterpiece of protest painting. It commemorates the bloody riot that occurred on Memorial Day, 1937, at Republic Steel's South Chicago plant. The white shirt and spring-like green dress of the defiant worker and his pregnant wife in the foreground are like a momentary break in the hurricane of policeman's blue, armed with pistols and billy clubs, advancing over the sun-baked, blood slicked asphalt. A single straw hat, symbol of care-free individualism,

lies pristine under the advancing boots.

It is Ben Shahn's strength that his intense human sympathies escape doctrinaire generalization; they are based on the plight of the individual. Even though, as a painter of protest, Shahn's position was liberal or even leftist; he has acted on social convictions rather than arbitrary political loyalties, and the causes he has espoused, and the evils he has attacked, as in the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, are ones in which history and sentiment, in retrospect, have upheld liberal attitudes. Sometimes the scenes he creates are all the more moving in that very often his actors are contented. He has remarkable insight into the lives of children, especially as they play in a world of make-believe that parallels our own. Shahn's people loaf when they can, and entertain themselves with musical instruments. His politicians are not monsters, they are only trivial people, superfluous in a world they can sometimes reduce to rubble. In "Fourth of July Orator," the minute scale of the would-be demagogues and the wide space of untrodden grass around them testify to American political health and to Shahn's humor in the midst of his sincerity.

In "Epoch," he comments on the general character of our times. A little figure, who seems not too at home in his acrobatic position, is balanced upside down on the shoulders of two performing cyclists, one bearing a placard "yes," the other denying him with a "no." The precariousness of the situation is pointed up by the bright carnivalesque shapes

PLATE XXVII

SHAHN, The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti

PLATE XXVIII

SHAHN, Scott's Run: West Virginia


000
000
ROSE

PLATE XXIX

SHAHN, Epoch

and colors, symbolical no doubt of the agitation and false gaiety of a world that offers a great deal of moment-to-moment distraction but very little stability. The mood is not solemn, but wry. Wry, too, and sardonic, is "Nearly Everybody Reads the Bulletin." The use of newspaper made into a fool's cap to cover the empty head of an inert figure who sits uncomprehending and uncaring is symbolical of the inertia with which people reject consciousness and action in a world where vigilance is the price of moral life. In most cases, Shahn's pictures express monumental figures moving in lonely fashion through a stark and empty world.

Origination like Shahn in the religiously saturated Jewish community of the Baltic States (he emigrated from Latvia to Boston at the age of seven), Hyman Bloom gravitated neither to the salons of Beacon Hill with their aura of aestheticism, nor to the revolutionary underworld of a class-conscious proletariat whose symbols could be drawn from the side-walks, hiring halls and newspaper morgues. Introvert, mystic, moralist, and one of the great expressive social artists of this age, Bloom takes his place in the company of Orozco by virtue of his capacity to feel within himself the most painful experiences of the human race and to personalize them in image and paint.

The "unpleasant" pictures for which Bloom is best known, the decomposing corpses and the detached limbs of 1945-7, represent a spiritually involved, and deeply moving approach to social protest painting. They were painted under the impact

of the War and the extermination of the Jews, and while they may fail to communicate at first glance the love that is as much their emotional component as the revulsion, they may be interpreted as modern man's shockingly new insight into his pitiful and defenseless mortality.

Bloom's "Child in the Garden" is based on a newspaper photograph of a child at an orphanage party; but its universality may be traced to its suggestion of the Christ Child and to the symbolism of baptism and rebirth indicated by the fore-ground pool. Its affirmation flows from the blazing foliage of spring in the background.

Jack Levine, whose paintings during this time had social connotations, still paints with his acid brush. He has a mannerism, peculiar to him, of painting large heads on his figures. This only tends to sharpen the satire of the painting. Levine's social awareness is clear and intense. What is valuable to him is to show, not that man has more than his share of labor, but that he has little, too little freedom. This shows up only too vividly in one of his more recent paintings, "Birmingham." This social comment points out the plight of the negro, both north and south. Levine depicts the anguish and fear of the negro figures at the advance of a pack of snarling police dogs.

His "Welcome Home," which is one of his earlier paintings, shows a piggish general at a banquet. His canvas "1932" represents the transfer of power from Von Hindenburg to young Adolf Hitler and the beginning of a black and bloody era for Europe. Hovering over the transfer is a third malevolent fig-

PLATE XXX

LEVINE, Birmingham

PLAGE XXXI

LEVINE, Gangster's Funeral

dimly resembling both Goebbels and Von Ribbentrop. The scene is shadowy, casual, foreboding and horrifying.

When Levine began working on his picture, "The Gangster Funeral," he put his thoughts in order on paper. He began, stating in effect, that man is the prior concern of man.

> I should like to paint a narrative because it is possible for adolescents to buy marihuana and cocaine on our streets with the connivance of the powers-that-be. Consequently I am at work on a painting of a "Gangster Funeral."
>
> Immediately questions arise such as what sort of dress shall be worn? What do people wear at a gangster funeral? This may seem a concern for a dramatist, a novelist. I envy them these interesting concerns!
>
> If they be wearing street clothes instead of cutaways, it becomes possible to have the fat man show a broad mourning band on his thick little arm. It would be amusing to make it a heart instead of a band, but, unfortunately, that isn't possible.
>
> A Widow. In deep mourning, clad in rich furs. Better yet, two widows! One very, very shapely.
>
> The chief of police, come to pay his last respects --a face at once porcine and acute--under no circumstances off to one side as a watcher. This would suggest a thesis other than mine, a policeman's thesis. He must be in the line of mourners, filing past to view for the last time the earthly remains of his old associate, who would, if he could, remonstrate with him for exposing himself in such a manner.
>
> If the chief's function is thus made clear, then it becomes possible to add a patrolman in a watchful capacity. I must now look for ways of establishing the identities of the mayor, the governor, et alia.
>
> It may be said that the idea is more fit for a novel or a film. This is ridiculous. As far as the novel is concerned, a picture is still worth a thousand words; as far as a film is concerned, the Hays Code requires it to show that crime does not pay, which is not my thesis either.
>
> This libretto in no way invalidates the possible creation of a work of art. On the contrary, it inflects it, it makes the project more complex. I see no harm in putting the con cious mind to work in this fashion.[15]

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[15]Selden Rodman, The Eye of Man (New York, The Devin-Adair Company, 1955), p. 162.

The first part of this chapter concerned itself primarily with social commentators that have gained world-wide recognition in this area of social-protest painting. These were the man, who I feel, were most outstanding. Of course, there were and are other socially conscious painters who have contributed much to this field. They by no means take a back seat to any of the before mentioned painters, but because of the scope of this paper and the multitude of painters that could be mentioned, I shall only briefly describe the remaining artists and their contributions toward this area of social-protest picture-writing.

America's most abused, most talked-of, and probably most dynamic painter of the American Scene is Missouri's Thomas Hart Benton. His political satire is evident in his mural paintings of his home state elections; his protest of the horrors of war is displayed with great feeling in his "Horrors of War" series. This series could have been painted by a modern-day Goya. He portrays with compassion the plight of the poverty stricken mountain people, with whom he lived for a period of time. While he was painting the 45,000 square foot Missouri State Capitol mural, he left the door open for all to come and criticize. Upon completion, he was accused of holding a great state up to nation-wide ridicule. Critics could not understand why, instead of imaginary heroes and idealized statesmen, he portrayed "Huck Finn and Nigger Jim," the Jesse James hold-ups, "Frankie and Johnny," Boss Pendergast, etc. His painting "The Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley" depicts a Missouri Hillbilly who has just

PLATE XXXII

BENTON, The Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley

stabbed his sweetheart; in "Persephone," he portrays the mythological goddess of nature as a realistic Missouri girl about to be violated by a local farmer. Benton's feelings toward the common man is evident in all of his works.

While Benton was painting the hill people, Aaron Bohrod was painting the back streets of Chicago. Bohrod first became known for his satires on Chicago. When his "Landscape Near Chicago" was first exhibited it raised a howl of protest from sensitive Chicagoans. It depicts the squalor of a home turned into a junk-yard pig-pen. The delapidated house, windows open, door standing ajar, the junked cars scattered around the neglected yard and the trash can, overturned, was not what most Chicagoans liked to see, even if it was true-to-life.

At this same period of time, Henry Billings was concerned with the political and social life of his age, as in his "Arrest No. 2," and Ralph Soyer was more concerned with the common man and his everyday problems. His "Doctors Office" could be a plea for socialized medicine. Here we see the distressed and anguished face of a mother in the waiting room of a Doctor's office, her son by her side. Her expression seems to express the question of that period, "Where will I get the money to pay the Doctor bill?"

CHAPTER VII

THE PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT AFTER WORLD WAR II

In the Forties and early Fifties artists were working with the many complex problems of mankind due to the war and the period of adjustment following the war. It was a period of false gaiety; it was a period of escapism. The political world, the race track, the prize ring and the other sporting diversions were represented along with dwarfs, clowns and harlequins in an effort to symbolize man's escape into himself behind his mask and from the outside world.

Several artists were at the height of their popularity during this period. Many of them worked as war artists and then came home to portray the home scene. These artists as well as the present day artists were and are concerned with these basic social issues: social problems, racial problems, political problems, the horrors of war and to a lesser extent, religion.

These artists who felt more strongly the need to bring to light social issues shall be described briefly in this chapter. They were people such as Ernest Fiene. This social critic recorded ordinary people doing ordinary tasks. His use of the clown motif represented man's attempted escape from reality. Another artist who used the clown and harlequin motif in his paintings was Karl Zerbe. Zerbe treated people

as actors upon the stage of life. His actors are wearing masks to conceal their true identity. These clown and harlequin series became very popular. In his more recent paintings, however, he seems to be more concerned with the integration issue in the south. Leon Kroll and Bernard Karfol were both concerned with people going about their duties and caught up in the web of life but somewhat aloof from their surroundings. Those who seemed occupied with portraying the middle class society were Robert Phillipp, Sidney Dickerson and Morton Roberts. Robert Phillipp took a hard look at the middle class society with all their mundane tasks and pleasures. He depicted people sitting idly at cafe tables, the bored waiter and the model in the studio. Sidney Dickerson and Morton Roberts give us the character of the ordinary man next door seen at the bar or in a parade. Their faces express the weaknesses of the flesh. Louis Bouche is also concerned with the everyday events of the middle class in their own back yard. William McNulty was concerned, among other things, with events of the country fair in all its color and gaiety and Doris Lee shows us the way of life for the country folk. We see the country school-house and Thanksgiving on the farm. John Koch gives us an intimate glimpse of middle class and upper class society in their homes while Louis Bose is more concerned with interpreting the poor man and his simple pleasures. In a rather whimisical manner, Peggy Bacon gives us people with their cats or hobbies. In a beautiful piece of social satire we see her character studies of people in art

galleries. In the same vein, Mitchell Siporin pokes subtle ridicule at people and their inflated egos as demonstrated by his parade of scholars marching in their caps and gowns. While Fletcher Martin portrayed his harsh version of the miseries of the human race in the cities, Jon Corbino painted the misery of the human race when confronted with floods and erosion. John McGrady depicts the social climate of the southern states of our United States and Alexander Brook displays his sympathetic outlook on the family life especially the southern Negro and his living conditions. Those who were most concerned with the social problems of the migration from the Dust Bowl area were Alexander Hogue and Otis Dozier. They depicted the harsh life and the trials and tribulations of these people and their constant fight with the soil in our southwestern states.

Probably the most sarcastic of the artists of this period was Paul Cadmus. He painted sailors and their girls, Coney Island, and Main Street U. S. A. His portrayal of the beach is so biting in its social satire that the Coney Island Showmen's League has officially denounced his painting "Coney Island" as a libel against their resort. This painting depicts the follies of the human race in their search for fun and amusement. His painting, "Aspects of Suburban Life" depicts two attractive girls, in shorts, walking along a street. As they approach the street corner, we see the leering faces of the three "drug-store-cowboys," the appraising glance of the policeman and the look of righteous horror in the eyes of the old woman.

These, then, were the outstanding contributors of the early Forties and Fifties.

PLATE XXXIII

MARTIN, Celebration

CHAPTER VIII

ARTISTS CONCERNED WITH SOCIAL PROBLEMS TODAY

In the past ten years several other artists have gained prominence with their concern with the state of human society and the dignity of man. The age-old problems that have faced man through the centuries have been joined with new horrors, the atomic threat, the civil rights movement in our country, and the revocation of faith.

David Berger and Joe Lasker are concerned with depicting scenes of family life. Berger shows the family at work and at play. Children and teenagers serve as favorite themes. Lasker deals with people in ordinary life and he also handles children with special sympathy. Charles Alston paints the family group but his families are portrayed with strange mask-like faces. They go through the motions of daily living, rather than living full, rich lives. Carroll Cloor portrays people posturing among the graves of their ancestors or other symbolic environments, as if they were on the stage of life. Often his people are portrayed in deep meditation. James McGarrell in his paintings symbolizes the closed-in-restrictions of modern day society from which there seems to be no way of escape while Howard Mandel depicts somewhat morbid people arrested in motion as if waiting for some unforseen fate, peeping out from strange interiors; and Strombotue, in cutting

satire, paints people in a cruel brutal manner bringing out all their faults and weaknesses. Noel Rockmore paints the inhabitants of the city streets in his home town of New York. Richard Wilt paints haunting, large-eyed figures of the city streets and George Tooker gives us the unusual aspects of suburban society. Sigfried Reinhardt transforms the figure into a greater reality. He says people are the children of the universe and Michael Lenson gives them the same mysterious quality.

Some of the artists use a humorous approach toward depicting the social problems of today. Such artists as Anton Refregier, Wayne Thiebaud and Harry Sternberg, use humor in their paintings to bring us their message of social protest. Anton Refregier deals with satire of people at work and at play. Wayne Thiebaud makes humorous comments on society of today, such as his depictions of robot-like figures in the human comedy. Harry Sternberg gives us his caricature of the human race.

Those artists that are more concerned with the mundane aspects of the human race are Jules Kirschebaum, John Wilde, Morris Broderson, John Bratby and Francis Bacon. Kirschebaum seems to take the futile aspects of life as his theme. John Wilde gives the human race a surrealistic surrounding as they move about as in a dream world. Morris Broderson paints his version of our faceless society. His message is that we are numbers, not faces. John Bratby, an Englishman, gives his version of the follies of the human race and Francis Bacon is

most noted for his paintings of the torments of the human flesh.

The following are other artists of today who have social connotations in their paintings. People such as Joseph Hirsch, who reflects on life around him. He idealizes man in his mundane and humble position as in his portrayals of the ice man, the rag picker, the butcher, the man in the bar and the prize fighter. George Tooker, portrays the physical drabness of life, the anguish of the human race. His intensity of vision brings to focus the real person in a mechanical society. Ralph Soyer portrays with wry humor and tenderness the humble people of the lower East Side of New York, the teeming streets, the derelicts of society, their anxious harried faces, their resignation toward life. He also portrays with compassion and tenderness the plight of the working girl, girls thin and hungry looking. Hirman Williams portrays mankind's predicament, the innocent, the guilty, the accusers, the alone and the procreant; often the guilty and the accusers are the same; they are monstrous personalities of man. Bernard Perlin shows humanity as if it were a mirror which reflects itself. He distills meaning from the common place, the obvious; he paints people where they congregate as in bars, dance halls, etc. He shows the desperate seeking themselves through contact and noise; their faces are often masks due to non-communication. Al Blaustein was influenced by Hyman Bloom. Blaustein expresses the dignity and simplicity of people under adverse and somewhat bizarre circumstances.

His figures are often accompanied by a wild animal to protect man in his identity. James Kearns depicts adults playing children's games, voluptuous females, stunted dwarfs, grotesque children, heartless toward their parents and the lack of communication between people. He is Goyaesque in his satire of bejewelled women. He portrays man's resignation in the midst of pain and loneliness and resignation to death as well as life. Kearns combines satire, comedy and tragedy in blunt statements. Leon Golub, in his pictures, displays man's implacable body, festering in his own sins, inexorable in the mutilation that has been imposed upon him in modern warfare, and his social condition takes on the resistance of stone as against the undulations of flesh and inevitable defeat. He shows that the dignity of man's endurance makes him a hero. Ivan Lorraine Albright also paints mankind festering in his own sins. He shows people who have lapsed into a disintegrating state of being detached from their surroundings. Nathan Oliveria, as Ensor, has a demonic humor. He expresses the bizarre and inconceivable aspects of everyday existence. He captures the seemingly implausible but real aspects of human life, as in his depiction of a ghost race with their bleak faces. Joyce Treiman portrays people as they are moving through life as if in a dream. Their blank faces are more like masks. Those that are not wearing masks, are concealing faces behind glasses.

There are other problems that concern the protest painter of our day, such problems as the political issues.

Some of the outstanding painters who use the political motif are Robert Weaver, Larry Rivers, Toni Ungerer and Phillip Evergood. Weaver paints current events ranging from a crime series to a political rally. His main concern is with reporting on the masses. Larry Rivers likes to pick faults with the false patriotism that is sometimes shown. Toni Ungerer turns the human being into a grotesque person as noted in his chairman of the board who manipulates his henchmen as if they were puppets. Philip Evergood, as described in another chapter, concerned himself with liberal and radical causes: strikes, rallies, demonstrations, social and political protests. He says that the weak are emancipated; the strong are bullies.

Then there are painters today who are more concerned with the racial problems, painters such as Billy Jackson, May Stevens, Robert Gwathmey, Karl Zerbe, Jack Levine, Ruth Gikow, Jacob Lawrence and Gregorio Prestopino. Billy Jackson uses satire to show the folly of the human race toward the rights of the Negro in America. May Stevens is concerned with the civil rights and the freedom riders. Robert Gwathmey depicts the aspirations of the Negro people and the failure of society to recognize them. He shows with harsh reality the deprivation, indignation and miseries of a people living in segregation. Karl Zerbe and Jack Levine, as described in another part of this thesis, are concerned presently with the situation of the Negro in our country. Ruth Gikow is concerned with the same situation which is universal, hurts and joys of a people, primarily the southern Negro. In her paintings we

see the fury etched on the faces of southern white women with children in their arms as they jeer at the colored woman and child as they try to enter an "all-white" school. She is most outspoken in her outlook on violence in the world. Jacob Lawrence, a Negro, is able, in his paintings, to capture the emotions of human beings; the extremes of joy and suffering are displayed with compassion. He portrays the emotional impact of war, the mental hospitals and the depressed lot of the patients, forgotten and alone. Gregorio Prestopino was influenced by the "ash can" school of painting. His paintings contain a high degree of sensitivity to the dignity of humble people and he displays a sympathetic response to the struggles, the tragedy and the comedy of their daily lives. His social realist paintings of the thirties had an anecdotal quality of the depression gripped working class. He did a series of paintings on our prison life and later a series on the Negro conditions in Harlem. His latest series shows his concern with the atom bomb. We see in his paintings the skeleton forms of our people under the ominous mushroom clouds of atomic warfare.

These, then, are the more outstanding social commentators of our day. They all have a message. All we need to do is to listen to their spoken word, look at their messages in picture form and learn--learn and apply their messages to our daily living.

My own paintings lean toward social comment. The social comment is sometimes biting, sometimes rather humorous.

In the painting "Decrepit Royalty" we see the decaying shell of a once haughty woman, now left only with her thoughts and memories. The moody dark blues carry the theme of loneliness; the knarled hands and lined face show what age will do to a one-time beauty. Even though her age has left her far from beautiful, her vain countenance shows through in the orange-red dye of her hair, a fleeting grasp at her long-lost youth.

In the "Negro Worker" we see the age-old plight of the southern Negro, working in the cotton fields, underpaid, uneducated and suppressed by his white brethren. Through the use of warm yellows, one begins to feel the heat of the sun at noon. The figure, though wiping his arm across his sweaty brow in a gesture of weariness, still shows the strength and determination of this social outcast.

"The Bath" shows rather humorously the feeling of a sense of well-being that the laborer feels in his attempt to wash away the sweat and grime of a day's work. The features of the face, the placement of the hand, point out the man's only feeling--personal, selfish gratification.

The painting, "Figure Study: Man," shows a man, lying on his back, contemplating a single flower. He is a lonely figure, withdrawn from the world around him, taking comfort in the simple beauty of a flower.

PLATE XXXV

LOWE, Decrepit Royalty

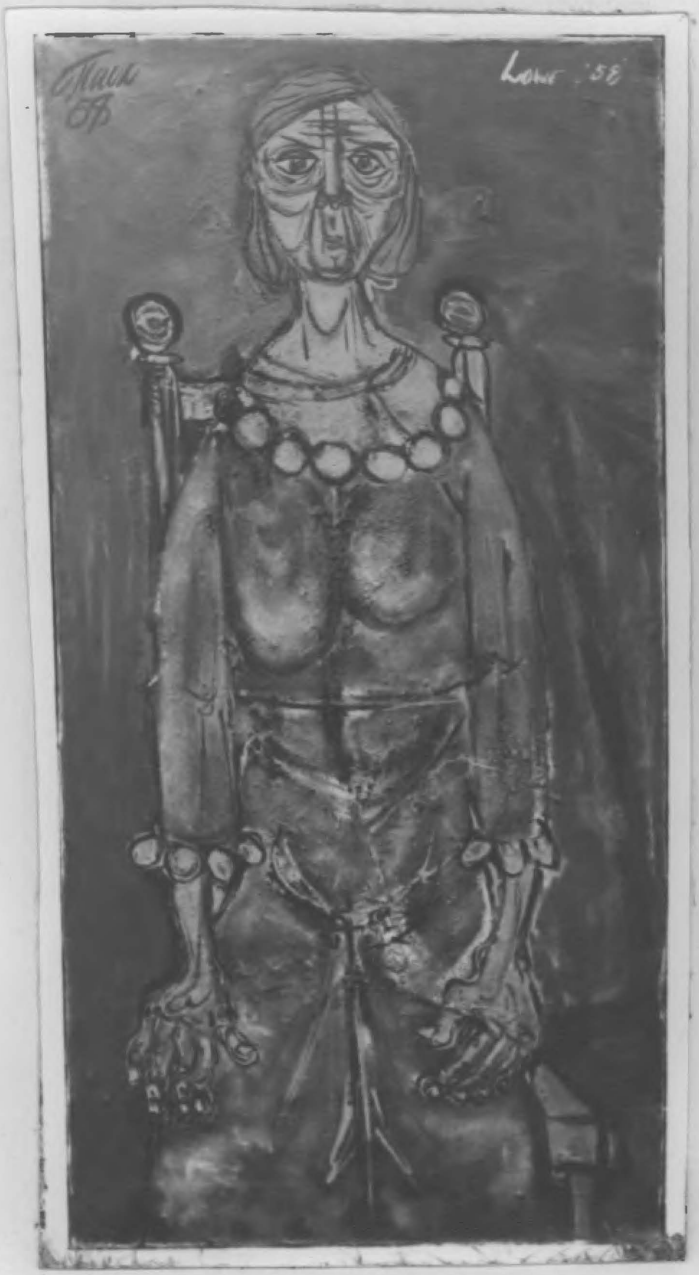

PLATE XXXV

LOWE, Negro Worker


Lowe '58

PLATE XXXVI

LOWE, The Bath

PLATE XXXVII

LOWE, Figure Study: Man

SUMMARY

There are many painters who were and are struggling against the social orders of their time. In this thesis I have tried to analyze only those who were most outstanding in the field of social protest picture-writing. They are a courageous minority. I hope their attempts to arouse public rath and fury against all suppressors to be victorious.

In conclusion, I feel that the artist's sense of responsibility must always be a personal thing, and its value for the public lies in the supposition that the public ultimately may rise to that personal truth which the artist has discovered. Surely the public will not rise if the artist refuses to respond to life, makes no effort to comprehend the world he lives in, or fails in that communication of emotion which is at the foundation of all art.

The artist's salvation must lie in what he can accomplish as a functioning member of the community in which he lives. But unless the will to integrate his activities with society's and to be a spokesman for its highest values is his own, no public activity on his part will bear living fruit. What the moralist has to say about the world we live in is almost certain to disturb the complacent and infuriate the builty. But the artist must stand firm upon his convictions. If society will improve conditions that these artists have

stived to show us, then, and only then, will there be peace on this earth.

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